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STAMPEDES ON THE KLONDIKE

HOW I MISSED BEING A MILLIONAIRE

By JOAQUIN MILLER

[NOTE.—On July 25th, Joaquin Miller sailed from Seattle on the steamer City of Mexico bound for Dawson by way of Chilkoot pass. His baggage consisted of a hand-satchel, and his available funds were less than one hundred dollars. It was his intention to walk over the Chilkoot pass, build a boat, shoot the White Horse rapids, and reach Dawson; then make an actual inspection of the mines, take a boat down the Yukon to the open sea and St. Michaels, and thus complete the circuit of the frozen North. He made the trip from Juneau to Dawson in fifteen days, and of all the people who started, he was one of the few that completed the trip to Dawson. His picturesque letters have been published in the *New York Journal*, the *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *St. Louis Republic*, and the *San Francisco Examiner*. A few bits of description from these ought to be put in the permanent magazine form and will give some idea of his adventurous journey, making the best introduction to the article that follows them.—Ed.]

CROSSING CHILKOOT PASS

BUT now as we stood fronting that granite-built and cloud-covered mountain pass, we felt that there was work, and terrible work, before us, especially if the threatened rain fell.

Resting a little time, the clouds lifted and we looked up. What a glorious spectacle, and what a splendid example of American manhood! It made my heart thrill and throb with pride in my great people. Away up where an eagle might pause and poise his daring wings with care, we saw below the clouds, against the clouds, and even in the clouds, the brave men climbing with their packs, pike in hand, holding on with one hand, holding the pike in the other. Sixty pounds, seventy-five, and one hundred, and in one rare case a giant French courier with two hundred pounds.

All the pictures that have been painted by word or on easel, or even in imagination, of Napoleon and his men climbing the Alps are but childish playthings in comparison. We raised a shout, and up the line it ran, the long, steep, and tortuous line that reached from a bluff above us on and over and up till it lost itself in the clouds. And still down from out the clouds the shout and cry of exultation of those brave conquerors came back, and only died away when the distance made it impossible to be heard any longer.

And now we began to ascend. It was not so hard as it seemed. The stupendous granite mountain, the home of the avalanche



THE TRAIL FROM DYEA¹

¹The illustrations are from Photos sent down by Mr. Miller. The *San Francisco Examiner* has courteously released Mr. Miller from his engagement to it, so far as this article is concerned.



WHIPSAWING FOR BOAT BUILDING AT LINDEMAN

and the father of glaciers, melted away before us as we climbed, and in a single hour of brisk work, we stood against the summit, or rather between the big, granite blocks that mark the summit. The pass is not so formidable as it looks, and it is not half so formidable as represented. Yet, mark you, it is no boy's play; no man's play. It is a man's, and a big strong man's, honest work, and takes strength of body and nerve of soul.

Right in the pass and within ten feet of a snow bank that has not perished for a thousand years, I picked and ate a little strawberry, and as I rested and roamed about a bit, looking down into the brightly blue lakes that feed the headwaters of the Yukon, I gathered a little sunflower, a wild hyacinth, and a wild pea blossom, for my buttonhole.

SHOOTING WHITE HORSE RAPIDS

BOOM! Bang! We were literally loaded into a cannon, shot in and down and out as through and out of a gun into Byron's hell

of waters; and then the shouts that went up with the tossing arms and waving hats! It was hearty, heart-felt, human,—as if the men were almost choking with solicitude; a wild, wild, Western shout from great strong men. Yet a shout with tears in it. But the regiment of unbridled white horses still plunged and leapt and charged in our wreck-scattered way. Ten thousand gleaming horses. These must be ridden down in one desperate dash. There was no old guard to follow, if our first brave charge failed. We must ride them down this instant, or be ridden down.

The special expedition, contemplating and all the time quietly planning for this time-saving venture, had the day before run up the American flag, although on British soil; and with all respect for the honest Britons; and never flew flag so gloriously, indeed, sublimely beautiful. This morning of this great white day we had nailed the staff to our vessel's side. It is the only American flag seen along the upper Yukon, although we are never out of sight of boats; and now as we paused a second on the waves at the mouth

of the cañon, ready for the final and more desperate charge, the excited people above us suddenly caught sight of "Old Glory." And such a shout! And then they broke forth in a tempest of cheers and song, in which "The American Flag," "Dixie," "Marching through Georgia," and "John Brown," were heard,—anything to give vent to the pent-up hearts as we rowed and rowed into the flying, white battle horses. They smote us right in the breast until the water plunged ten feet into the air and drenched even the captain away back at the helm. The oarsmen were knocked down, but again they grasped their oars and again we plunged on, and again they were knocked down and the boat went reeling to the right. And then from our rear the rushing cataract came and spun us almost like a top, drifting and tossing us from one white horse to another as a toy. The captain now guided his boat from the bow.

Again the barge was knocked about and whirled around in the white sea of white horses until the captain once more stood in

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the stern. Of course there was wild excitement with some of us. And there were oaths from the grand old captain; for his boatmen did not understand the nautical terms of the old sea-dog and Alaska steamer captain; and so confusion followed.

That is the brief story of the most daring adventure in which I ever took part; and I am no child in years or adventure, as all men know. Our crew and passengers are Americans. One is an old Yankee soldier of the Civil War. Two are from Illinois and are father and son—the boy but fifteen. It makes me proud to be an American when I find such courage and coolness in men who come from far apart and were but yesterday strangers, and who are entirely untrained in handling water craft. Captain McCormick was born and reared on the shores of Lake Erie. He is tall, strong, and has a voice like a lion. But we did not know he had such a voice until we were in the whirlpool and foaming cañon and had charged into that camp of wild battle horses.

AT THE HEAD OF LAKE LA BARGE.

WE TENTED in our aspen park, a world of waters before us and behind us, and almost entirely around us, for the river, debouching into the lake, is many miles wide. Our beautiful camp at the head of beautiful Lake Le Barge, with its one island, was also in a graveyard. Here we were not troubled by mosquitoes; they seem not to like the quaking and restless aspen leaf. I learn that they are not found in these sweet groves as a rule. A dolorous loon kept diving and disappearing between his melancholy cries as our men took turns trying to hit the red crown that blossomed from his black head, and then a great white owl, as white as his melancholy companion was black, and as mournful as any band in the grass at the head of a grave, came out to see with his big eyes if he could see in the



EMBARKING ON LAKE LINDEMAN

golden twilight what the men were shooting at. I expected to see the men turn loose on the owl with a will. They did not.

Quietly they sat waiting for the loon to come back. Quietly they sat down, one by one, on the edge of the steep bluff by the groves, with their guns on their laps. The loon came back, close by, too, but they did not lift a hand or say a word. They sat there in the golden, awe-inspiring Arctic twilight, silent; a loon in the water, with his crimson crown at their feet, a snow-white owl at their side, the six dead men in their graves under the grass there, and none could say which of all was the most silent, — the dead men under the grass, the great owl in the aspen grove at their side, or the armed argonauts with their rifles across their laps and their weary feet dipping in the dark, still waters.

Then the loon cried again and was gone, and the owl lifted like a little white cloud back into the aspen trees, and the men melted away one by one into their tents



EIGHT MILES ABOVE DAWSON

STAMPEDE is a good old word, or at least part of it,—older than Julius Caesar. I first heard it in 1852 in connection with a train of emigrants that had been broken in two by a herd of terrified buffaloes. I think the word "stampede" at first was "storm-pede" or storm-of-feet. Some say it was at first "stamp-pede"; but no matter, it is the big thing—the fashion at Dawson on the Yukon.

Stampedes are almost continuous here. In the latter part of August there was a strong undertow, or current, that was steadily pulling all the able-bodied men out of town. Captain Hansen, the head of the great Alaska Commercial Company, said with a bit of dismay one night:—

"It is a big one this time. Men throw down their tools and leave things and go off almost anytime, and often when we need them most to put on a roof or hang a door, but they don't stay long. They generally say that they are not very well and want to lay off a day or two, then in about one day and two nights they come limping back to their work, too stiff to lift their legs, and meekly take up their tools. But this new thing lasts, and the carpenters and mill hands keep going. It will be the clerks next."

I had just returned from the task of examining the mines on the different creeks in detail. It is dull getting back from almost anywhere over these dreadful trails; but when worn out, foot-sore, hungry, thirsty,—very thirsty, and nothing there to drink when you get back,—it is really and truly dull, very dull, trudging back.

There is color in the land, gold and green and brown, and a sense of newness, a sense of discovery, as you go out and as you climb and descend into new and unknown gulches; there is the restful and peaceful contour of the great dreamful hills; there is the perfume of the tree and moss as you go on and on, but when you come back, it is old, old as a book you have read, and dog-eared, and are done with.

As I climbed out of the deep creek or gorge at the end of my task I could see little dots and spots of people, standing afar off, on the naked knobs or round top of Quartz mountain,—could see them now and then moving along the bleak, black ridge, along the moose trails, people no larger or taller than a span, little black, hump-backed people, bent and crooked with packs. I sat down and waited for some of these men to come along my own moose trail and tell me what it all meant. By good fortune a bright young fellow from Oakland, my own town, was at the head. The others were shy and kept apart till this young fellow asked after wife and babe; then they all sat down. We smoked together and swapped confidences. And this was the tail end of the present stampede that was driving all the Klondike. I had thought it going the other way. It had started north. It was now heading sharp south; but I had bread, enough for a whole sea biscuit for each man. And with a whole big sea biscuit in his stomach and hope in his heart, who could be hungry?

Would I go with them? "A pointer," "sure thing," "straight tip," "five dollars to the pan!" These good fellows remodeled

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"A pointer," "five dollars ws remodeled

my pack. It rests you mightily to fix your pack over. It is also a tremendous help to fix your feet, even if you do nothing more than turn your socks wrong side out, adjust the wrinkles, pull the legs up, and things like that. It was Too Much Gold this time, and now, although it had really started in another direction, this was the third stampede of the year for Too Much Gold. And strangest of all, here were two men who had been in a former stampede to the same place, and really and truly, here was one, a French-Canadian, who had been to both the former stampedes to the same

We began to descend to the gorge. We were striking Too Much Gold on its headwaters. Down, down, down, moss and spruce gum, berries of the best, blue berries, cranberries, jew berries, lots of good, sweet berries, some berries I never saw or heard of, on the rich golden moss. So steep and so deep the gorge; it looked as if the bottom had fallen out and we had fallen on top, but at last we rested.

Seven of us in a little fly tent: It was as full as it would hold. The night was bitter cold; windy, too. Then came a wayfaring old man with a most miserable and plaint-



SLUICING IN BONANZA CREEK

place. This Too Much Gold lies in the outside, the extreme outside, of the great Klondike mining country, farthest up the Klondike of all mines yet found.

You remember the story? how it came to be called this? No, well, an old Indian who sat watching some miners washing gold near Circle city a few years ago said to them:—

"Go to Thlondic (Klondike), plenty gold; go to one more creek, two creek, plenty gold; plenty gold one creek, plenty gold two creek; go to three creek, three creek, Too Much Gold."

ive voice,—lots of wayfaring people passing up and passing down in the gusty night,—but this man with the plaintive voice did not pass; he asked to sleep in the tent. Certainly! Then he got in between us. He told us all about himself. He told us all about everything, except Too Much Gold and things we wanted to know. Then he told about his wife and several children as we all lay spooned and tried to sleep. Then he told us about his father, how good and kind he was, and how he had left him the farm, but that there was a seven-hundred-dollar mortgage on it and he had put thir-

teen hundred dollars more on that, and he wanted to stake a claim and sell it for just enough to pay that and take him back to Maine.

"All right," sighed my Oakland journal friend; "hope you will do it, but let us sleep now. Good night."

"Thanks, thanks! It does a man good to find a sympathizing friend in this cold, dark country. It helps a man right smart. Say, do you know if I knew what to bring along, I would have been lots more comfortable. For instance, my father left me a great, big woolen nightcap."

"Good. That's right," said the young man from Oakland wearily. "Now let's go to sleep. Put your hat on your head if it is cold."

"Thanks, thanks; but I say, you must not mind if I take off and twist my overalls on my head, turban-like,—would you? —it's awful cold on my head here." And that strange man, without waiting for an answer, took off his overalls and trousers and tied them about his bald head while we all shivered from the draught; then he filtered down into the full set of spoons, and we all were so glad.

There was a rush to stake next morning. Your stakes must be six feet high, four inches wide, blazed or hewn with a square at the head. Smaller stakes are not good.

All of us set out at a signal,—the break of day was the signal,—but there was only one man who knew where the last stake up the creek above the discovery stood, and that was the weary-voiced man. All of us rushed up and on, and on and up. Then we came back, looking for the last stake of the day before. Then we found the mild-voiced man from Maine, hewing his stake. He had stopped behind, staked off his five hundred feet above the last stake the night before, and was now the proprietor of the first claim of that day, and ready to pan for his prospect.

Some staked, some did not. It was quite a mile now up the creek, maybe two, three miles up to the last stake, and so I, having had enough of this last Too Much Gold stampede, climbed up Quartz mountain with the going down of the sun and set my face toward Dawson.

Seven days of picturesque travel, yet only the last fragmentary end of one day given to the chronic "Klondike stampede."

But the return is awful: all spirit, all activity, all everything, is gone, and you creep and crawl back home and get into a corner, and ask nothing and answer nothing; you only want to be let alone.

In this plight I lay curled up in a corner behind some boxes in the loft of the Alaska Commercial Company. Aye, comfortable enough; best bed to be had in Dawson; plenty of good fellows to come and ask you about your feet and poke all sorts of fun at you. And fox skins,—I was literally buried alive in fox skins, fox skins of twelve tails; red foxes, white foxes, black foxes, and silver gray foxes. But even all this fails to comfort unless you have a real old-fashioned porterhouse or sirloin steak, and good California Zinfandel. You don't get strong or well in a day or week when you get run down. The one wise thing to do is to take the first boat and get out.

"Get right up! Get right up! It is only eight miles away. The mounted police have struck it up at old Baker creek. They call it Montana creek to fool us. It is old Baker creek, eight miles out of town, you get in a boat here and are rowed up, and you stake and row back. Biggest thing ever found. Will call it Montana creek now because the Montana boys with Captain Healy of the North American Transportation Company have helped find it. Biggest thing ever heard of—seventeen dollars to the pan!"

I was too lame to stir. I gave him my sack and told him to grub-stake the first man he could find, and he hastened away. I lay there like one on a battle field shot to death.

Next morning I was able to get about, and at daylight in a drizzling rain stood out on the river bank and watched the string of boats which had started up the stream in the night toward Montana creek sweep down the river in the drenching rain with the returning stampede. They had hoped, as is always desired by the stampedeers, to get back quietly and unobserved before full dawn. They were disgusted to find the whole town, men, women, children, and dogs, standing out on the bank in the rain to receive them. They assumed a look as we bantered and laughed, assumed in a way that told that they had struck nothing remarkable, but they bore themselves bravely, and all that sort of thing, even if it did

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MILLER AND LIVERNASH AT THEIR DAWSON CABIN

rain pitchforks. Yes, they had staked, but not one of them could guess what he had staked. You must always find gold before you can record, and you must record before you begin to take out gold of any account. Now, this Montana creek, like Too Much Gold, although staked for a long distance, is still an unknown quantity; and this was the second stampede to this creek within six months, and the second intense excitement and stampede this week, and yet the week only partly gone. And so it goes on the Klondike.

I was pulling up a bit on the sixth day, felt fine, in fact, and prepared for a real, home-stroke stampede, all my own too; there were only four of us in it, for I had a straight tip. Yes, they assured me they were all right and all ready. Our plan was to rise at daylight and rush out and up through the rain and mud to near the mouth of Eldorado on the bank of Skookum gulch. I went to bed at four p. m., back behind my boxes in the loft. At eight a big, round face rose above me like a noonday sun. The man held a dripping candle.

"Get up; I have the biggest news that ever came to camp. My foreman has struck

ten dollars to the pan on Skookum gulch and has found a ten and a half dollar nugget only three inches below the moss. Get right up and go! Only ten miles. It's raining, but you can put on your gum boots and coat, and have got time to get there by daylight and be a millionaire."

This man with the dripping candle, wild with excitement, was good, honest old Captain Morgan. Captain Morgan was my best friend and oldest in the Klondike. Governor Morton of Indiana had commissioned him Captain of the 149th Indiana before he was yet of age, and his record is glorious. Here the old hero stood, commanding me to take part on the instant in the third terrible stampede of the week.

Now, I had made a covenant with friends, — in fact, I had engaged to go on my own stampede at daylight, and had promised Mizner, the chronic stamper, as well as the kind cashier of the Alaska Commercial Company, to lead them into the land of milk and honey by the light of the morning star. I could not go and keep my word with Mizner and the cashier. I flatly refused to get up, and the brave old soldier pulled a few other of his friends together and sent them



IN MAIDEN MEDITATION

forth in the dense darkness in the face of a tremendous storm across the Klondike, up the Bonanza creek, right into the bogs, right through the swamps with twenty-foot prospect holes to stumble into every few rods.

And I went to sleep. The next morning, I could not find my big-brimmed hat, and had to borrow a hat from the clerk, also one of my stockings and a pair of gum boots had gone away without asking leave. I looked up the street and down the street as I went out to get my seventy-five-cent cup of coffee; the new town was as empty as a new coffin. I could not find the cashier, the good and kindly Captain was gone also; I had no boat, no boots; I began to think I had lost my head; I began to wonder to myself where I was at. I sat down on a great heap of fur robes and smoked a cigar. At last, Captain Morgan came. This old veteran had made twenty miles that stormy night and there my soaked coat lay, down in a box of goods.

"Well, sir," began Captain Morgan as a man came up, "this is Mr. Meenach. He is the man who struck it on the hill above Skookum gulch. I must go and get some dry clothes."

Captain Morgan hastened down stairs and a mild-eyed middle-aged blond answered my question.

"Yes, struck it all right; richest thing ever found in the Klondike, or anywhere else. Me and my partner have been working in Seattle till this spring. My partner's name is Peterson. He is a Dane. I am an American and was born in Kentucky. We found a \$10.50 piece right below the moss last night a little before dark. Then we panned out three pans and got \$29.75 besides the \$10.50 piece. It is the richest thing ever found, I think. Men will not take one hundred thousand dollars for their claims. They are almost three hundred feet up a sloping hill above Skookum gulch. Skookum gulch runs into Bonanza about half a mile below Eldorado. Skookum gulch was the richest thing ever heard of till this thing last night. Skookum is owned at the north by Ferguson and Alexander McDonald. Sorry you did not get in last night. Goodby."

This in brief is what Mr. Meenach told me about this last stampede, but it was now too late. If I could have pulled myself together, hundreds would have been before me. I can only add that I found during the day all that he said verified. It was truly the richest thing yet found in the Klondike; how extensive, I don't know. Of course, it may be shallow and limited, but I think not. My friend, Captain Morgan, the Indian, and now a millionaire, had come back smiling after a run of twenty miles up and back. It don't seem to hurt men, especially if they "get it," to do this sort of thing here. I had found out as the day passed what had become of the kindly cashier and confidential keeper of about two bushels of miners' "sacks," and so sat in his office where the bookkeeper was at work making all sorts of excuses for his absence. He had been one of those to whom Captain Morgan had gone after leaving me. He was on a stampede, and had the keys of the great safe in his pocket. At last there stood about a dozen men demanding their sacks. Where was the assistant cashier, Charles Raap, if Mr. Charles V. Devany could not be found?

"Well," said I, "Mr. Charles Raap has a headache, as well as Mr. Charles Devany," and then they began to see through it, and we all laughed together and the miners did

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not blame them,—said it was their first
offense, hoped it would be their last, and so
on, but at three p. m. both the cashier and
assistant cashier came limping in the back
door. They were very wet and very muddy,
but very happy. They had the gold in their
hands, several dollars worked out from only
a few inches below the moss. They showed
us the gold and hastened away, wet and
dripping, to record their claims.

“If we had stayed an hour longer,” said
Mr. Devany, “we could have brought down
a tumblerful of nuggets. As it was, we
only got about three dollars to the pan, but
that is enough.”

This in all my experience is the most re-
markable stampede of the miners I ever
knew. These young men did not dream of
having any active part in the mines for

some time till this run came to Skookum
gulch, but now they may be young million-
aires. The two men, Meenach, the Ken-
tuckian, and Peterson, the Dane, were until
last spring employed in Seattle, and knew
nothing of gold mines till lately, and yet I,
an old miner,—but, ah, well! How close
lightning may strike and not hit! My hat
was in this last, but I was not. I did not
know that it was the same thing, how could
I? My secret had got out.

I saw Mr. Meenach this morning; he tells
me that he rocked three hours yesterday
and took out \$820 from his new claim.
Others in the adjoining new claims are
doing nearly as well. How like a romance
all this last week of tumbled events seems.
Yet I have tried to set things down liter-
ally and exactly as I heard and saw them.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

IN ACCENTS sweet the exiled singer sung,
Of flying sun and rain, of hills and home;
The pathos of his lonely voice it rung
Out from the island deeps, across the foam,
To “wine-red moors,” and graves of martyrs lying
Unheeded of the peewees’ mournful crying.

O fragile lyrist of the sad-sweet tongue,
Who, weary, went to sleep on Pala’s height:
His childhood’s home, dear land of which he sung,
To dawn no more forever on his sight!
The wind and rain to voice his fame are vying,
The sounding wave in cadence sad replying.

To him in vain the reddening heather calls,
In vain the sun breaks gloriously on the moor;
He heeds not, for a somber shadow falls,
Between him and the “house with open door.”
The prayer he breathed, “to behold again in dying,”
Is echoed in the peewees’ mournful crying.

Parma Gentry.